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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000838

SIPDIS
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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN, BARGHOUT
PARIS FOR J MILLER
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 14 LEADERS UNFAZED BY DRAWN-OUT
GOVERNMENT FORMATION PROCESS

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C/NF) March 14 leaders in separate meetings grumbled about coalition dynamics but reiterated their belief that Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri would ultimately come to agreement with Hizballah and its allies on the formation of a government. All admitted, however, that recent incidents in Khirbet Selm and Kfar Shouba had escalated tensions and could presage additional unrest. End Summary.

GEAGEA COMPLAINS OF
"THE WALID AFFAIR"

2. (C/NF) Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea told the Ambassador and PolOff during a July 23 meeting at his home in Maarab that Jumblatt flatly refused to meet with his March 14 allies. Geagea was frustrated with Jumblatt's intransigence and his overtures toward Hizballah, but he characterized discussions between the coalition's leaders as fruitful, "except for the Walid affair." Geagea said he was in close contact with Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri and although they may disagree on details, they had a common strategic vision for the coalition. He described his relationship with Kataeb Party leader Amin Gemayel as solid as well, adding, "The only problem with Amin is he wants a larger part of the cake than he deserves."

3. (C/NF) Kataeb Party Leader Amine Gemayel for his part was dissatisfied with the formation proceedings but seemed resigned to them and believed there would be a solution soon. He speculated during a July 22 meeting with the Ambassador and PolOff at his home in Bikfaya that little would change with the next government. Gemayel called for a return to the 1949 Lebanon-Israeli Armistice agreement's border demarcation and urged that Lebanon be included in Special Envoy George Mitchell's peace process initiative.

JUMBLATT FEELING
LITTLE SENSE OF URGENCY

¶4. (C/NF) Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt during a July 22 meeting with the Ambassador and PolOffs at his Clemenceau residence maintained that he was not allying himself with the March 8 coalition. "I have my own position," he declared. Jumblatt was undisturbed by the delay in the government formation process and was in particularly high spirits, perhaps because his son, Taymur, had returned to Lebanon from Paris within the past week.

¶5. (C/NF) The Ambassador asked Jumblatt whether or not rumors were true that March 14 had been unable to meet to discuss government formation because he had refused to attend. Jumblatt declared that he would attend such a meeting, but dismissed the need for it. "Saad has enough problems," he said. Jumblatt echoed the words of multiple Lebanese officials and called for patience with the government formation process. He reported that his confidence-building measures with the Shia will continue soon with a visit of Druze religious leaders to the southern Beirut suburbs, returning an earlier visit by a group of Shia scholars to the Shouf.

¶6. (C/NF) Jumblatt also said that an agreement had been reached for three Druze ministers to be seated in the next cabinet including Ghazi Aridi, who will continue in his post as Minister of Public Works. He said there would also be a Druze Minister of State, and that although he is insisting on Talal Arslan filling the third slot, Hizballah and its ally Free Patriot Movement leader Michel Aoun are opposing him.

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Jumblatt confirmed for the Ambassador that Minister Elias Murr (Defense) is likely to retain his position. (Note: Murr himself expressed confidence that both Saad Hariri and President Sleiman supported his continuing as Defense Minister in a July 24 meeting -- septel. End note.)

SECURITY THREAT
LOOMS LARGE

¶7. (C/NF) All three leaders were alarmed at the recent events in Khirbet Selim and Kfar Shouba and agreed tensions were high. Gemayel confirmed that he and his son Sami were confined to their Bikfaya residence in the hills above Beirut because of security concerns. He told the Ambassador that he had received credible threat information from the Lebanese Armed Forces Intelligence Directorate that compelled him to curtail his and Sami's mobility.

COMMENT

¶8. (C/NF) Geagea, Gemayel, and Jumblatt seemed resigned to the drawn-out government formation process, and none was particularly optimistic that it would conclude soon. Jumblatt made no apologies for his behavior toward his allies or Hizballah, and his actions are hardly uncharacteristic, as he always has maintained that his first priority is the welfare of his Druze constituency. Each leader asked us during our meeting for updates on his coalition partners. For his part, PM-Designate Saad Hariri told us July 24 that he was taking his time with government formation because he wants to ensure that March 14's victory in the parliamentary elections is not lost in cabinet formation. He also stated his firm rejection to the "blocking third" opposition veto. End comment.

SISON